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SUBJECT: CICIG AGREES TO INVESTIGATE MURDERS OF WOMEN IN
GUATEMALA

REF: 07 GUATEMALA 1967

¶1. Summary: On March 6, at the request of the Guatemalan government, the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) agreed to investigate murders of women. During the official signing ceremony, attended by the Ambassador and other members of the diplomatic community, President Colom affirmed his commitment to combat violence against women. CICIG Commissioner Castresana, noting that 590 women were murdered in 2006, announced that CICIG would investigate paradigmatic cases of "femicide." End Summary.

¶2. On March 6, CICIG Commissioner Carlos Castresana signed an agreement with President Colom and representatives of the Secretariat of Social Work of the First Lady's Office

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(SOSEP), the Presidential Secretariat for Women (SEPREM), and the Office of the Defense of the Indigenous Woman (DEMI) to investigate murders of women in Guatemala as part of its mandate. The agreement was made at the request of First Lady Sandra Torres de Colom. The Ambassador and other members of the diplomatic community, along with senior government officials, including the Attorney General, attended the signing ceremony at the National Palace of Culture.

¶3. CICIG Commissioner Castresana asserted that discrimination engenders violence against women. He described "femicide" as one of Guatemala's most serious criminal phenomena. He noted that 590 women (an estimated 10 percent of total murders in Guatemala) were reported murdered in 2006, and that criminal statistics indicate that the majority of crimes against women originated within the family.

¶4. Castresana underscored the need for an adequate judicial response to deter criminals, as well as better coordination of social and educational services and civil justice to reduce the level of violence. Combating impunity, he said, is the best means of preventing and reducing the occurrence of "femicide." He said CICIG will investigate paradigmatic cases. It will also aim to strengthen public policies to protect women, and highlight the theme of intra-familial violence.

¶5. First Lady Sandra Torres de Colom characterized "femicide" as "a crime against humanity, family, and society," and a violation of the right to life based on gender discrimination. Noting that 614 women were killed in Guatemala in 2007, she lamented that Congress had not approved the pending law against femicide, which defines and sanctions crimes against women. The First Lady asked CICIG to investigate as a priority case the murder of Alba Mishell

Espana Diaz, a 9-year-old girl who was kidnapped and murdered in Camotan, Chiquimula, in June 2007.

¶6. President Colom pledged to end impunity in cases of murders of women. He promised to implement by January 2012 "solid rule of law," and urged Congress to expedite approval of the law against femicide.

¶7. Comment: This is the third priority area that the GOG has petitioned CICIG to investigate. (The other two petitions called for investigation of the alleged fraud and embezzlement of funds from the Guatemalan Bank of Commerce, and investigation of murders of public bus drivers.) Murders of women, which constitute an estimated 10 percent of all murders in Guatemala, have been attributed to various motives, including domestic violence, gang revenge, common crime, organized crime, and narcotrafficking. In most cases, the motive is difficult to identify in the absence of effective police and judicial follow-up.
Qeffective police and judicial follow-up.
Derham